

“These grants are a win all around – schools will be safer, communities will be more prepared, and young people will become better students and citizens.”

-Amy Cohen, CNCS Director of Learn and Serve

Overview

Citizen Preparedness Through Youth Leadership (CPTYL) is a Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) Learn and Serve funded initiative to engage K-12 students in planning for and responding to natural and man-made disasters through a service-learning model. Montana received one of ten “Learn and Serve Homeland Security” grants nationwide.

Each of the ten national Learn and Serve Homeland Security Grantees is taking a different approach to meeting grant objectives. In Montana, schools are pioneering this effort through the CPTYL model. As a project partner in this endeavor, the University of Montana (UM) Division of Educational Research Services (DERS) is providing six pilot sites with training in three major service areas – Disaster Preparedness, Community Safety, and Conflict Resolution. The DERS training supplements the academic curriculum, providing students and teachers with additional tools to design and implement innovative, socially-important, and sustainable community projects.

Participating Schools

Six pilot sites were chosen as sub-grantees to carry out the CPTYL project. Sites were chosen for their experience with service-learning, local risk of natural and man-made threats, and other factors. The sites are as follows:

- [Hardin School District, Hardin, Montana](#)
- [Lewistown Junior High, Lewistown, Montana](#)
- [Libby K-12 Schools, Libby, Montana](#)
- [Lockwood Elementary, Billings, Montana](#)
- [Plentywood K-12 Schools, Plentywood, Montana](#)
- [Sentinel High School, Missoula, Montana](#)

The CPTYL Process

The CPTYL schools rely upon community partnerships to ensure that students are meeting real community needs. Each CPTYL site works closely with its local Citizen Preparedness Council (CPC) to ensure that student participation is genuine and that service activities will have a strong and visible impact upon the safety of the community. Active participation in a civic forum empowers participating youth by giving them a voice, providing them with an outlet to practice speaking, critical-thinking, and decision-making skills and builds awareness of the democratic process.

Another mechanism that determines the direction of CPTYL projects is the Safe Schools Assessment Resource Bank (SSARB) developed by the University of Montana DERS. The SSARB is a tool that surveys students, parents, and community members and identifies the major school-safety strengths and weaknesses at a particular school. The SSARB is an especially important component of the CPTYL project as it helps students and administrators to focus service projects upon areas that truly require attention, rather than superficial one-time projects that have no long term impact upon student achievement or community improvement. In schools where bullying is identified as a major issue, the CPTYL service-learning project may focus upon conflict mediation. In schools where the safety plan is identified as an issue, the service project may involve student leadership in revising the plan or in helping to develop new safety drills, for example. The SSARB is also a valuable tool as it can help in the assessment of CPTYL project itself by acting as a pre-post test of school preparedness issues.

CPTYL schools and communities receive valuable training in Geographic Information Systems (GIS), Conflict Mediation, and other Safety/ Preparedness issues from DERS as a means of enhancing the academic curriculum and chances of successful and sustainable community projects. Examples of the training and current CPTYL projects are detailed below.

Current Projects and Progress

Libby K-12 Schools, Libby, Montana

Libby students and the local CPC are partnering on an ambitious project that seeks to “strengthen existing disaster response infrastructures and building linkages between schools and homeland security initiatives, which will protect the lives, property, and environment of Lincoln County and its citizens.” A core group of 16 youth leaders have received training in GIS and are working closely with DES, RSVP, county officials, law enforcement and many others to enhance the county GIS database. This work involves the tedious and highly technical creation of new data layers, ground-truthing, and error assessment. Such work has major ties to the academic curriculum in math, science, and geography and requires skills often not taught until the college-level. The work of these students represents a very significant contribution to the community, the school and students. Libby staff noted that “this project has affected our students in so many positive ways. We began this project in our alternative high school, which serves the students at greatest risk. Because of their exposure to so many adults who are interested in teaching them advanced skills and are so appreciative of their service to the community, our teens, who are reclusive by nature, are far more social and outgoing with the adult community. These young people have presented their project to the District Administrative Team, the District Science Curriculum Team, the Libby K-12 School Board, and the Libby Rotary Club. With so much positive feedback, our students grew in stature before our eyes. They conduct themselves with far more confidence than they did a semester ago.”

Lewistown Junior High, Lewistown, Montana

In Lewistown, CPTYL students are taking action to ensure that “the community approaches and handles conflicts in a nonviolent way and is committed to respecting fundamental human dignity for all citizens regardless of background, economic status, race, religion, etc.” To meet this end, Lewistown has a major service-learning project that links middle school students trained in conflict resolution and non-violence with elementary students. The middle school students use methodology learned at a national “Peace Jam” conference where seven students had the opportunity to meet with Nobel Peace Prize Laureates. These and other students are also helping to pilot a peer-mediation project at the middle school level.

Other Lewistown CPTYL students are engaged in a project that utilizes training in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and traditional science curricula to assist the community in determining the health of Spring Creek. The GIS team has begun to plot GPS points along the creek and have taken water quality samples at these points. This project is in its beginning stage, but has great promise in contributing to a pool of knowledge that will help inform local environmental health decision makers.

Each of the Lewistown projects relies upon major partnerships with community members and organizations. The local Disaster and Emergency Services (DES) council is a major partner for the overall project. The GIS project partners with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality.

Lockwood Elementary, Billings, Montana

Lockwood middle school students are working to make their school and community safer by researching and presenting information to the school and community. Technology plays a key role in Lockwood service-learning projects. Through technology, Lockwood students have been able to inform their community about high-risk hazards in their area (refinery safety, fire, major storms) via an informative Web site built by students. These students have also used GIS technology to create school fire-risk assessment maps to inform school administrators about potential hazards. Other GIS projects are currently being planned for the next school year. A low-tech but high-impact service-learning project involved creating 72 hour emergency preparedness kits for homebound community members and distributing and teaching recipients how to use the kit. The 72-hour kit project was a highly successful one, and even helped a senior couple during a late-season snowstorm in the Billings area. A letter from the couple can be viewed on this site. Lockwood students are given many opportunities to develop their communication and leadership skills through these projects and often make presentations to community groups.

Plentywood School District #20, Plentywood, Montana

In Plentywood, students are taking advantage of their proximity to the United States – Canada border and the presence of the U.S. Border Patrol to learn more about issues of border safety. With assistance from the Border Patrol and community health organizations, Plentywood

students produced and distributed community health and safety packets that informed residents about natural and man-made emergency preparedness.

Plentywood students also played a major role in revising their school emergency plan, training the school and community about Internet safety issues, and began a project aimed at mapping patterns of trash within their community, and identifying “methamphetamine related waste products.”

Realizing that the greatest emergency threat in Plentywood was most likely weather-related, the school partnered with the National Weather Service to undergo “Storm Watcher” training. A number of students are now certified weather watchers and will be reporting to the NWS during the summer months, and well into the future. The project brought the eighth grade science curriculum to life and simultaneously transformed students from passive recipients of knowledge into active citizens responsible for informing their community about critical safety issues.

Sentinel High School, Missoula, Montana

Sentinel students are undertaking several CPTYL projects that address the unique safety concerns in Missoula, Montana. Among these projects are a Safe Routes Home and to School that utilized GIS technology to identify the safest routes for elementary students to take to Russell elementary school; the Urban Bear Project which partners with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and many others to inform residents about the human/wildlife interface in the Missoula valley; and the Classroom Emergency Kits Project which involves students in revising school safety plans, improving “lock-down” procedures, and building kits to make extended classroom stays more bearable for students and staff.

Hardin School District, Hardin, Montana

Hardin CPTYL students were fortunate to be able to assist their local CPC and the Tribal Emergency Preparedness Council at Crow Agency with a county-wide safety drill that simulated a chlorine spill on the interstate. In preparation of the drill, Hardin students learned about procedures for “sheltering in-place” and about hazards of chemical spills generally. These students became local experts on “shelter in-place” requirements and trained the Crow Agency school staff on these procedures. Hardin students are currently involved in GIS training activities, and are planning new projects for the upcoming school year.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation of CPTYL projects are especially important components of this grant initiative. As this is essentially a pilot project, the OPI, together with DERS, CNCS, and the University of Montana use a variety of instruments to understand how these service-learning projects impact student academic achievement, community partnership development, civic literacy, and community safety generally. The Year-One report is currently being compiled and will be available soon. This and other OPI reporting tools can be viewed on the Learn and Serve Montana Home page.

